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MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (CIVIL DEFENSE)

SUBJECT: (U) Cuban Capabilities for Attack on the United States

1. The strengths and basic capabilities of the various elements of the Cuban military establishment, together with the military support capabilities of the civil air organization, are listed in Attachments 1 through 4.
2. After examination of all factors, we consider that, in any realistic sense, Cuban forces (those which would operate under Castro's control) are not capable of conducting any significant amphibious operations against the United States mainland.
3. About the only type of operations we can visualize in this area would be hit-and-run demolition/sabotage carried out by squad-sized groups using motor torpedo boats or comparable craft, or (an outside possibility) one of the Cuban Navy's coastal patrol vessels, for transport. An equally remote possibility is similar operations carried out by small groups of infiltrators (probably not more than a dozen) dropped from single aircraft. In the same range of possibility, individual Cuban aircraft could overfly the Gulf Coast area. The only area, however, which could be reached by jet aircraft from Cuba, operating at altitudes which would avoid or postpone radar detection, would be Southern Florida.
4. We concede that all types of combat aircraft in the Cuban inventory can carry out conventional bombing and/or strafing attacks, and certain types could carry tactical nuclear weapons over a restricted range. But we have every reason to believe that no nuclear weapons are available to the Cuban government.
5. In the light of the Cuban situation now, in the context of the larger world situation, we consider it unlikely that the Soviets would permit their equipment or personnel in Cuba to be used for aggressive operations against the United States. We further believe, under present circumstances, that the Soviets would go to extreme lengths to prevent any Cuban attempt to carry out attacks on the mainland, even within the limited Cuban capabilities.

S. B. FRANKEL  
Rear Admiral, USN  
Chief of Staff

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#### CUBAN GROUND FORCE STRENGTHS

1. The Cuban regular army consists of 75,000 personnel. About 100,000 more semi-trained reservists exist; and there are about 100,000 more personnel enrolled in militia or home guard units.
2. The Cuban forces are organized primarily for suppression of the civilian populace and counter-insurgency operations. They probably have not yet trained at levels higher than battalion combat team.
3. Even with major assistance from Soviet advisor/instructor personnel, the Cuban forces do not, at present, possess more than a capability of resisting a major attack for a brief period of time. There is no basis for crediting the Cuban command with the capability of organizing and staging an amphibious operation.
4. The logistic system of the Cuban armed forces is most elementary and inefficient. It is improbable that the present services of supply are hard-pressed to support even Cuban forces in remote areas of the island. There is no reason to believe that the logistic system would be capable of supporting any sort of an amphibious attack on the United States mainland.

## SUMMARY OF CUBAN NAVAL STRENGTH

1. Cuba has no major naval surface units or submarines.
2. The largest ships in the Cuban navy are:
  - a. 3 ex-US frigates, mounting three 3-inch guns each, with several 40-mm and 20-mm antiaircraft guns.
  - b. 2 ex-US PCF, coastal patrol vessels, each mounting one 3-inch gun, one 40-mm AA gun and six 20-mm AA guns.
  - c. 1 gunboat (ex-US) mounting one 3-inch gun and four 20-mm AA guns.
  - d. One auxiliary vessel (used primarily for midshipman cruises and training), which mounts two 4-inch guns, two 3-inch guns and five 20-mm AA guns. (The operational status of this vessel is not clear).
  - e. Six sub chasers carrying only depth charges and light weapons.
  - f. 16 motor torpedo boats (PT).
  - g. The remainder of the vessels in the Cuban navy are light patrol craft, tenders and tugs numbering about 22 units. These have little, if any, combat capability.
3. Cuba is not known to have any landing craft or other specialized equipment for amphibious operations.
4. The Cuban Naval command is not believed capable of conducting any significant amphibious operations or joint offensive operations even within the maximum limits imposed by the number and type of present combat vessels.
5. The Cuban navy as present is believed capable of conducting only coastal patrol operations and, possibly, small-scale harassment of foreign ships in or near Cuban waters.
6. We have identified 12 Soviet-built KOMAR guided missile craft in Cuban ports. Each of these are equipped to launch two 13-mm guided missiles. The missile is technically capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. However, we have absolutely no indication that the KOMARS now in Cuba are so equipped. Furthermore, we believe that the Soviets are largely operated (and fully controlled) by Soviet personnel. Their employment now, or in the near future under Cuban control is most unlikely.
7. All Cuban navy craft would be extremely vulnerable to attack by United States surface units and aircraft.
8. Any concentration of these vessels, as would be required for any sort of formal attack operation, would almost certainly be detected; and interception, attack, and destruction undoubtedly could be effected before the fleet reached any significant area of the Gulf Coast mainland.

## SUMMARY OF CUBAN AIR FORCE STRENGTH

1. The Cuban Air Force now possesses:
  - a. 36 MIG-type fighters, a mixture of the MIG-15, MIG-17 and MIG-21 types.
  - b. 11 obsolete US-built B-26 prop-driven light bombers.
  - c. 8 to 14 Sea Fury MK-1 aircraft.
  - d. About 45 helicopters.
2. The Soviets have introduced 23 BEAUGLE/IL-28 jet light bombers into Cuba. However, most recent information indicates that only two of these aircraft have been assembled, and there is no indication that they have as yet been flight-tested. It is very likely that no Cuban crews are capable of operating the BEAUGLE at the present time.
3. The Cuban Air Force possesses only a limited combat capability in the areas of defensive operations, or army support operations. It possesses no capability in major tactical bombardment operations.
4. The MIG-type fighters (particularly the MIG-19 and MIG-21) are structurally capable of carrying a tactical nuclear weapon. However, we have no indication that such weapons are in Cuba and certainly no Cuban crews have ever been trained in tactical nuclear operations. Soviet Air Force advisers and instructors are believed to be present in substantial numbers in the squadrons now equipped with the older MIG-type aircraft.
5. The Soviets have also introduced a force of 39 FISHERMAN/MIG-21 aircraft into Cuba. We strongly suspect that these aircraft are largely Soviet-operated, if not, in fact, a Soviet unit.
6. There is no evidence that the Cuban Air Force has ever trained in major joint operations with the army and certainly has never trained for any sort of amphibious operations.

## CUBAN AIR TRANSPORT STRENGTHS

1. Cuba possesses about 25 transport aircraft, 12 Soviet-built IL-14 light transports and a miscellaneous collection of US and British commercial types. Of this fleet only a few (perhaps not more than 4 or 5) of the US-British types are believed operational. Probably most of the Soviet transports are operational.
2. At a maximum effort, and by assembling practically all flyable transport aircraft, the Cubans probably could airlift a force of about 300 troops. However, there is no evidence of any capability in the Cuban military to organize an airborne operation, there are no trained paratroop or air-transportable units in the Cuban army and the equipment which could be airlifted would be confined to individual small arms, machine guns and, possibly, a few jeeps.
3. In any realistic sense, it must be assumed that the airborne attack capability of Cuba is limited to dropping a handful of semi-skilled parachutists from single aircraft.